# ΠΕΡΙ ΤΗC ΠΑΙΩΝΙΑC

## ON THE PLANT CALLED PEONY

*Translated from the French edition of A. Festugière (Un opuscule hermétique sur la pivoine.) by J. Pedro Feliciano.*
*Names and most characters restored from CCAG, and Vatican MS 952. Thank you to Phainolis Isopsephia for locating the CCAG transcription.*

The following Byzantine magical text revolves around the virtues of the peony plant. In Greek tradition, peony was attributed to the Moon, and bore a reputation for manifold powers that appears to mirror and even rival that of mandrake and vervain in western Europe. The plant is also frequently mentioned in the Greek Keys of Solomon/ Hygromanteia[1], which seem to be closely related to our text and perhaps share a common origin.

The text has Judeo-Christian elements, but references Hermes Trismegistus and Egyptian religion. We can therefore cautiously posit a Pagan/Hermetic original, seeing also that the magical virtues of peony (also known as *selegonon*) are already known in the Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri (e.g. PGM I, 247, euphemistically; PGM III, 333; PDM XIV, 886; PGM LXII, 24). Moreover, peony is also mentioned in the *Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius* as a plant attributed to the second Decan of Cancer, and magically used in conjunction with the Decan to heal pulmonary afflictions.

Peony is given this name for it was discovered by Paeon. Some also call it *tzêritôn*. It is said to be consecrated according to the previous book called 'Archaic' (*or* 'Ancient'). Here is its recipe.

When the moon is waning, seek out the peony. Let it be set in a place that is sufficiently open and visible from all sides. You can work when the sun enters Virgo. Peony grows especially in the mount Haemus region and the Tauromenion mountains, as well as by Babylon the Great, in Thrace, beyond Gadara, and on the edges of the Aegean gulf. It further grows in other places, but contains less virtue than in these, due to geographic location, fate, the zodiacal signs, and the stellar effluxes. You may proceed as follows.

It is needful, as we mentioned, that this sacred plant be set in an open area,. Thus, being pure, having taken a closed peony seed and another from its open fruit, then rolling them in seven leaves from the same plant, bury them in a high place of your choosing. When it sprouts and the evening has come, it shall be found. Take care to guard it from showers, winds, and aerial gales. Now, on the day of the moon, at the beginning of the first hour, being the hour wherein the moon is decreasing, the Sun being in Virgo, leave your house taking a prepared seal skin, consecrated at the moment when the animal was cut up, as aforementioned in that sacred book, in the chapter on dissections. Draw these characters on the skin and tie it up with pure raw silk about the plant's root. This is what you must draw:

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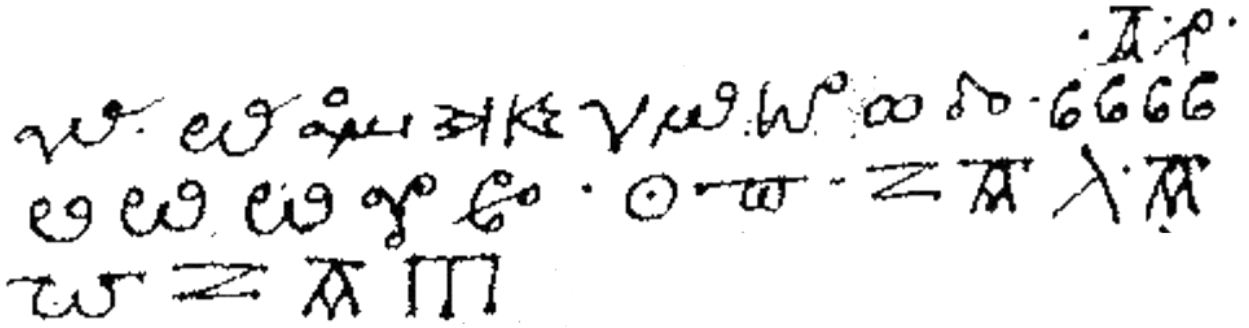
[1] Ioannis Marathakis, *The Magical Treatise of Solomon, or Hygromanteia* (Llewellyn/Golden Hoard, 2012)



Whilst you are tying the skin, utter also this prayer:

"Blessed be the God of heaven and earth, hallowed and glorified be Thy primordial name. All nature lauds Thee, Thy cosmic immanent form wholly glorifies Thee. For Thou art the sole perfect one, uncreated, invisible, ineffable, unchangeable, boundless, unutterable, eternal, unsearchable, fathomless, beginning and end, **ALPHA ADÔNAI SABAÔTH SEMIMEPHORÀZ GESERAGE AMNOIA IANA SADAE**. Thou grantest poverty and wealth, thou abasest and exaltest, rectifiest and healest, bringest death and life. Do Thou, Lord of Hosts, lay Thine eyes upon me from amidst Thy holy dwelling and the throne of Thy glory, granting me, Thy servant, this favour, so that this plant may become effectual against all poison, against fever, whether tartan, quartan, or other; against demons and evil spells of men. Let it serve as an amulet for victory against all rulers male and female, and against all manner of evil eye, nefarious influences, and machination. Do Thou render me gracious by way of this sacred plant, so that I may be favourably hearkened to. Furthermore, whensoever I lay my hand on this plant, let me draw to myself the one I desire; whosoever consumes a remedy from this plant, let them be guarded against afflictions of the breast, chest, liver, spleen; likewise of the lower belly, kidneys, and against wind, shadow (?), migraines, gout, arthritis, and all blight of the vineyards, crops, field, garden, or orchard; against every foe who seeks to enter a house; to restore speech, to prevent (sexual) consummation (i.e. through a binding spell); to restore memory; to induce regular menstruation. Whithersoever I take this plant, whether by land or sea for anything, by its virtue let my journey be favourable and eased, whether I betake myself to the market, to a sale, or aught else. And just as God bestowed on the lodestone the virtue to draw iron to itself and never unloose it, in like manner let me draw to myself all men and women, by virtue of this plant, such that they may hasten after me with offerings as unto a god. By the grace of the Holy Spirit and of this plant, let robbers be blinded wheresoever they enter, in such wise that they lose their way. Let this plant be an aid to conceive and prevent conception. In whatever remedy I employ it, whether in a cast or balms, let it purify, mend, and lead to complete healing. Let this plant ease childbirth; let it be useful in travel, serving as a beacon to find one's way. Let it be an aid in combat and all dangers by water, on horseback and in precipices. Yea, let this plant be efficacious in all treatments and practices I undertake. For blessed and glorified is Thy name throughout the ages, Amen".

Then in the Chaldaean, Syrian and Persian tongues, recite these words: **AUGAAKHDI KHAUNKHAPH GIASP LIAPH PHANAG MEREL SOULPHAM MPERKHAM MOUKH TIM, LIAPH AKHRONAPHAT MOUZOUPAT LIRKHAM ZALPHANÔ, POTH** (or **TOTH**) **SERPHOU SELPHOU NAMKH TOKHAG SILKHA MPEMELKH**. Amen, Amen, Amen, forever".

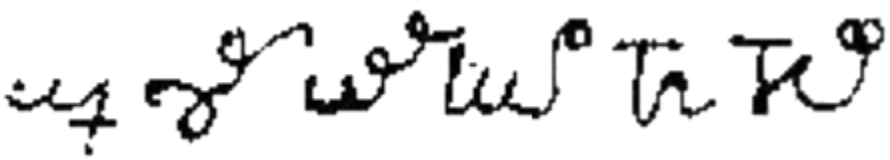
Then again this prayer: “God sitting upon the Kerubim, do Thou rouse Thy power and save us”

Recite the first prayer seven times facing the Orient, but this Chaldaean and Syriac prayer do so only once.

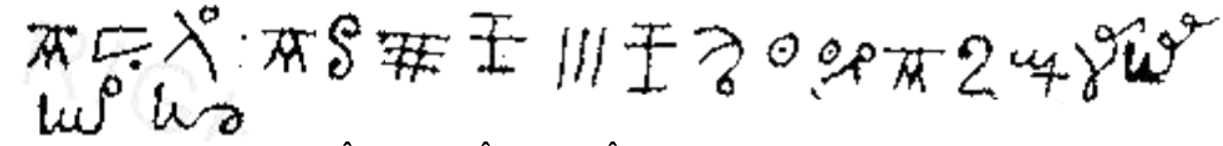
Having done as abovesaid, return to this place for seven days to ensure that everything is as it should be. Every day when leaving, utter the prayers before sunrise. The next day, that is the second, having left your house at the first hour, take an unused ceramitis, whose virtue is renowned and proven, as well as a siderite and beryllite. Fumigate the plant in a circular fashion, uttering the two prayers. Then carefully uproot it, handling it delicately as will follow, and you shall have it duly consecrated. Indeed, once you have divided it into its parts, the root, sprigs, leaves, fruit, open and closed seeds, you will see that these components have greater virtue than all the aforementioned kinds (?). It is said that this sacred plant was revealed unto Hermes Trismegistus (to be given to) mortals as a medicine to relieve pain and useful to one’s existence, as was written in the Egyptian holy books.

Whoever inscribes the ineffable names of the Most High on any piece of its root

shall have no reason to fear demons; likewise, evil spells shall not afflict men. If he inscribes these characters on it and holds it , he shall not fear poison or any other ill. For he shall repel tartan fever, quartan, daily, and any other sort. He shall keep the evil eye at bay, as well as nefarious influences and machinations. This plant will grant grace to its wearer before all and bestow their favour on him. If you suffer from epilepsy and hang this root about your neck, you shall be healed from all seizures. If one is possessed by a demon, make an incense from a small portion of this root, and you will rout the demon. This is a divine operation.



*Vat. 952*. If you grind a small radicle from the plant in the day and hour of Venus, then shake it and give it to drink to a couple who hate each other, forthwith they shall love one another. Whoever places the root under their pillow shall not experience nightmares. It is a good remedy for the spleen. No demon or magical influence shall enter a house wherein it is placed. Whoever has been poisoned and drinks it shall suffer no ill effect. When the seed is consumed with good honey it is useful for the whole body, and likewise for cattle. A woman who eats the root shall produce an abundance of milk. It is a worthy remedy against snakebite. Whoever is possessed by a demon and eats it shall be healed. When a man is afflicted with madness and is fumigated with this plant, he shall be healed. When a child is born, grind the root, mix it with the milk, and it shall be auspicious for the breasts. Whoever carries the root and leaf shall thwart magical influences if they inscribe thereon these ineffable names of the Sovereign God, Master of all



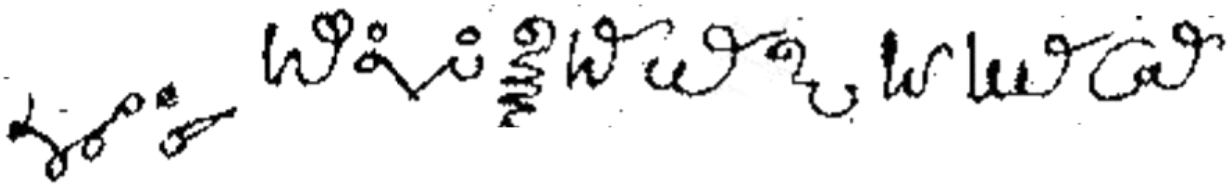
in addition to **ALPHA ADÔNAI ELÔI SABAÔTH**. Whosoever inbreathes the smoke and wears the root, leaf, and seed, shall not be bitten by snakes. Moreover, the plant surpasses all others as a guard against all evil works, when the specified names are inscribed on the day and hour of the Sun.

Chapter 2: Regarding conception.

Take a closed seed from the plant, wrap it in a pure silk sheet, then have the woman wear it on her lower belly and she shall retain the sperm. It is necessary to write the above characters on the plant during the hour of the sun

Chapter 3: A most powerful phylactery.

Having taken peony root on the day and hour of the Sun, carve upon it these characters using a *germai* knife, then hang it from the highest tree. It is a fertility charm which, from on high, watches over the vineyards, fields, gardens, guarding them from all ill. This is what you must engrave:



*Paris 2419 (VIII 1, 191, 13 ff)*

(A potion)

Take a radicle from the plant, with *tourakison* and *satyrion*, in such quantity as is customary to take without a prescription, along with male incense, and keep the whole in your home. Then, take a potsherd and using a gold needle engrave on it the figures of two lovers embracing and kissing one another on the third hour of the night. Then suffumigate it with the aforementioned plants whilst saying: "Saviours of love, bring me the one I love". Forthwith they will make her appear, knocking at your door, saying "Open, open for me". Do not divulge this mystery to anyone. I have handed down the magical power to you so that you may know the talent I possess. [2]

From the sap is made a remedy which, once drunk, heals all internal afflictions which arise in the trunk, chest, the two parts, that is, the liver and spleen, and the umbilical region, lower belly, hypogastrium and kidneys. Essentially, it is a most potent phylactery. Here is its recipe: peony sap, one ounce; *potamogeton*, one ounce; styrax calamite five (ounces); one ounce of theogone root. Having ground down these ingredients, the dry with the wet, place them in a glass vessel. When

[2] Here follows a distasteful passage warning the reader to keep afar from women because of their supposed impurity. I felt no need to include it here

needed, give three *hexaghia* to drink with wine. As the patient drinks, you must recite the same prayer seven times, and the patient shall be healed.

A phylactery to protect vineyards, orchards and gardens can also be fashioned with the root. Using a *kermai* knife, inscribe these characters on the root (*characters were not reproduced in the transcript of this MS*), and hang it from the tallest tree such that, from on high, it may watch over the vineyards, orchards, and gardens. Should you do so, no hail, frost, torrential rain or storm shall bring ruin. Furthermore, this phylactery will repel all injurious creatures, such as serpents, caterpillars, locusts, brakhos (?), corncockle, *palkhos*, *boukhos*, *pelokham*, which destroy vegetables and fruits, and *khoumenos* which passes by night by the roots of trees and eats them, as well as the *khoun* which destroys vines by night.

(*concerning robbers*). If you inscribe on another radicle **TOMÊRI PHATNÊRI**, and hang it behind the door of the house, you shall keep all evil at bay from thence, making that home joyous and auspicious.

(*concerning mutism*). If someone is mute and unable to speak, fumigate them with this root whilst saying **PHRIÊL**, and you will heal them.

(*concerning amnesia*). If one suffers from forgetfulness, let them chew a bit of this root, and while they drink its juice, you must say **RAPHAÊL**. You will set their mind aright.

(*concerning period cessation*). If a woman's menstruation has stopped, give her to drink an ounce's worth of juice from the root. Utter also these words: **APHA KHAMÁ NAI ALLÁ PHAZÁ TAMANÁ**, and you shall cure her. She shall assuredly have an abundant flow. You may stop the flow if you give her to drink of another juice without saying a word.

Having taken sprigs from the plant, write: **GENEMPTRI GARGÁR**. Wear this so that, wherever you may go to do aught, sthe way shall be fortunate and untroubled, and you shall receive honours wherever you go, with people rushing to you as if to a god.

If one writes on the leaves the words **ARKEU ILI**, and places them on the lintel of a door through which robbers might enter a home, they shall be blinded and lose their way

The fruit of the peony is effectual for conception and likewise to prevent it [*same text as Vat. 952, chap. II. followed by*:] This remedy makes the sterile conceive, and makes barren she who has children. Taking a seed from the open fruit wrapped in a consecrated seal skin, fasten it to the loins for three lunar cycles when the moon is waning: thus, the woman shall be without child. You must also write these characters on the skin (*characters were not reproduced in the transcript of this ms*). If you desire to test this, perform it on an animal or bird, and it shall not reproduce.

With the seeds a balm can be created, which is effective against anginas, purifies festering wounds, and restores tissue. Here is its recipe: peony seeds, 1 litre worth; sap from the stalks, one ounce; sage juice, two ounces; *memakham* root, two ounces; wax, one ounce; duck fat, one ounce; terebinth, one ounce. Keep this mixture, and when the need arises, it can be applied. When you mix it, recite these words: **AÔ IÔ IÔN ELÔI OIKHAM KHIAK ZAMPRI RIPHÁ KHAM**.

If a woman in childbirth suffers from violent pains such that grave danger arises, take an open seed from the plant, place it in oil, then rub it on the loins and lower belly, and she shall give birth with ease. During this operation, you must be consecrated. Let no one know of these remedies, and do not give them to anyone else but your own son, but keep them secret as you would a treasure.